



Characteristics, Tips, and Strategies for  
Supporting People With Autism

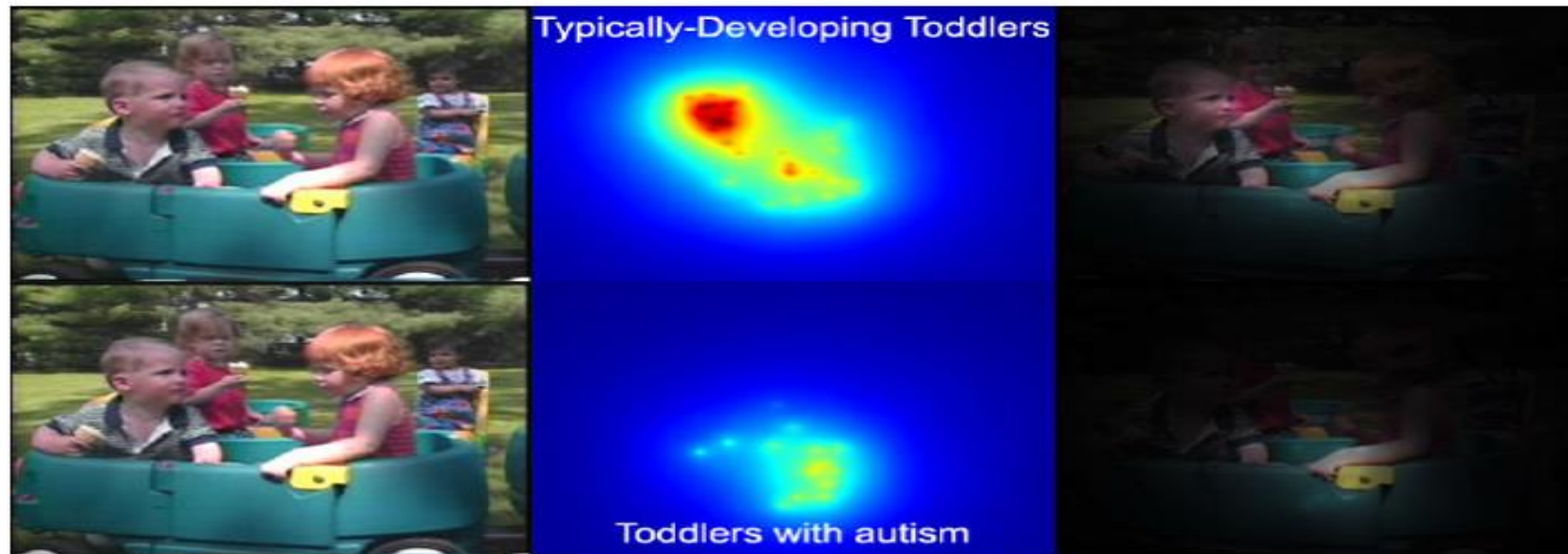
Presented By: Julie Mallett, Autism Specialist

# Overview

- Autism Facts and Characteristics
- Strategies
- ESMW Services



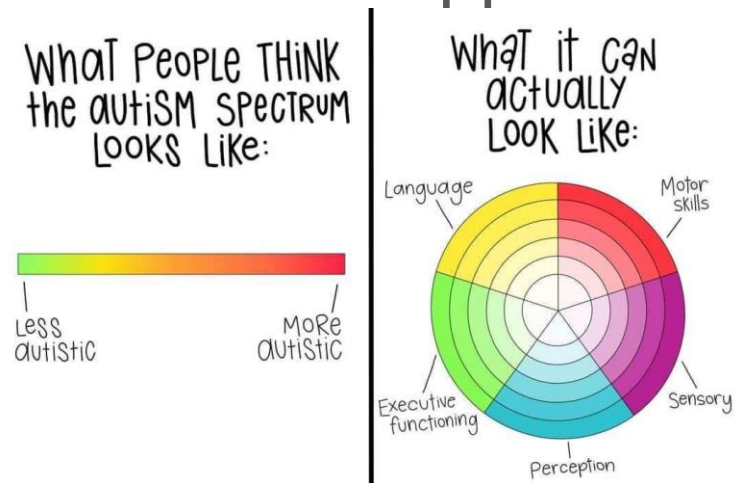
# What do you already know about Autism?



**Figure 3.** Saliency maps for typically-developing 2-year-olds (top) and for 2-year-olds with autism (bottom). Images at right show color data scaled from black to transparent and overlaid on the still image from the video scene.

# Autism

- “If you have met one person with autism, then you have met one person with autism.”
- Autism is best characterized as a spectrum disorder, meaning that there are a range of symptoms and the intensity and presentation of those may look different from person to person.
- Individuals vary in strengths and area of support in 5 main areas:
- Language
- Motor Skills
- Executive Functioning
- Perception
- Sensory



# Facts About Autism

- 1 in 36 children are diagnosed with ASD
- Equal across socioeconomic class, lifestyle, education, race and ethnicity
- 4 times more common in boys than girls
- It is often a hidden diagnosis



# Diagnostic Criteria

- Categories:
  - Social communication/social interaction
  - Restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
- Severity:
  - Level 1: Requiring Support
  - Level 2: Requiring Substantial Support
  - Level 3: Requiring Very Substantial Support
- Diagnosis Specifiers
- Other criteria:
  - Present in early developmental period
  - Clinically significant impairment

# Characteristics of Autism

## People with an Autism Spectrum Disorder may exhibit:

### **Difficulty forming social relationships--they may:**

- avoid/not make eye contact
- not understand personal space
- smile or laugh at inappropriate times
- have difficulty playing/interacting with peers
- lack social imaginative/pretend play
- not show ranges of emotion or facial expressions
- lack understanding of empathy and have difficulty taking another person's perspective

### **Difficulty with communication—they may:**

- be non-verbal or have limited speech
- repeat words or phrases
- have difficulty expressing their needs and/or feelings
  - be literal
- give unrelated answers to questions
- not read or use non-verbal communication skills...
  - facial expressions, tone of voice, body language, etc.

### **Insistence on sameness/routine—they may:**

- develop rituals or routines that need to be followed
- crave predictability
- have difficulty with transitions/change
- get upset by minor changes
- demonstrate stereotyped behavior

### **Specific or odd interests—they may:**

- be fascinated by certain topics, toys, or objects
- line up toys or other objects
- play with toys the same way every time/ like parts of objects

### **Cognitive skills—they may:**

- only read for information (not fond of fiction)
- have difficulty with organizational skills
- have difficulty with abstract and conceptual thinking

### **Difficulty with processing sensory information—they may:**

- be sensitive to touch, sound or bright lights/visual stimulation
- demonstrate self-stimulating behaviors such as rocking, hand flapping, spinning, fidgeting, vocalizations, jumping, etc




# Sensory Overload

<https://youtu.be/aPknwW8mPAM?si=MJHFOsmz7kB7Uac5>



# Sensory Needs

## The 7 Senses

	Tactile	Feel
	Auditory	Hear
	Visual	See
	Gustatory	Taste
	Olfactory	Smell
	Vestibular (Hidden)	Balance & Movement
	Proprioceptive (Hidden)	Body Awareness

## SENSORY SEEKING VS. SENSORY SENSITIVE

**SENSORY SEEKING (Boy):**

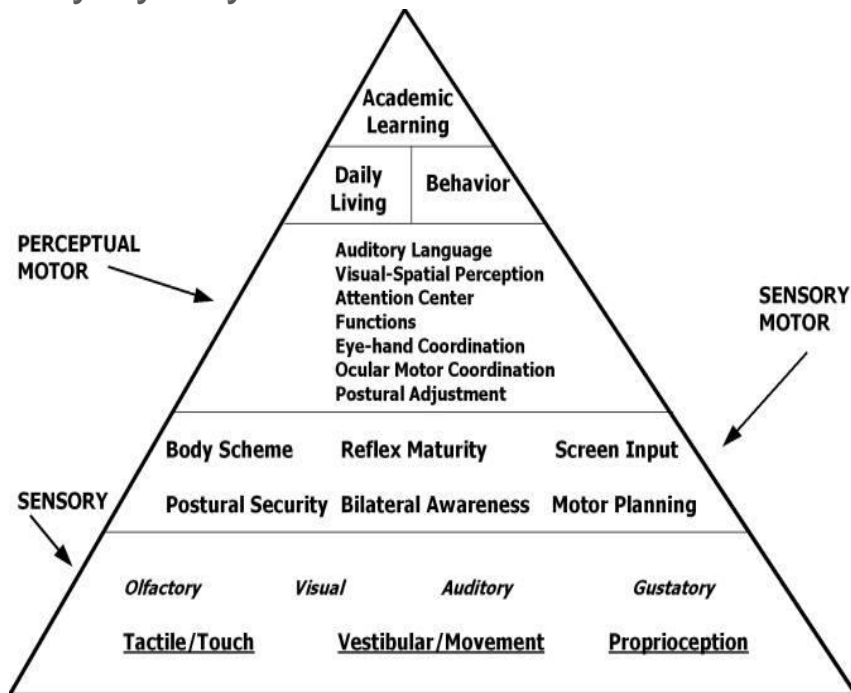
- I could bounce on a trampoline & spin in circles on the tire swing all day long
- I like to smell things
- I love having my hair brushed or played with
- I love to play with the lights and turn them on and off
- I enjoy making lots of noise – the louder the better
- I don't notice if my clothing is disheveled or not on right
- Tackle me, roll on the floor with me, give me bear hugs
- I love taking risks, jumping from high up and crashing into things
- I chew on everything in sight. I love crunchy foods
- I love being tickled and massaged
- I hate wearing shoes

**SENSORY SENSITIVE (Girl):**

- I am scared of trampolines, monkey bars or to swing high
- I dislike having my hair brushed
- I hate certain food textures so I'm a picky eater
- I close my eyes in bright lights
- I cover my ears to loud noise
- I'm very sensitive to smells
- I take out the tags in my clothes and there's some fabrics I won't wear
- I don't like being tickled
- Don't touch me
- I'm really cautious with every step I take
- I hate being barefoot

# Sensory Needs

- Everyone seeks and avoids certain sensory input.
- Sensory needs are needs much like food, water, etc. If you are not at a baseline, you can not achieve your full potential.
- Sensory needs are individual and vary day by day as well as over time.



## Accommodations:

- Offer a variety of fidgets/sensory items.
- Allow for movement or offer a space to take a break.
- Have noise cancelling headphones.
- Allow individuals to listen to music on their phone/device with headphones.
- Avoid strong perfumes/scents, offer chap stick, scented lotions, etc. if a student seeks smells.
- Incorporate movement into the day
- Heavy work
- Flexible seating
- Cover florescent lighting with cloth to filter light (if applicable)
- Have a calming space within the area (if possible) with fidgets and visuals for calming strategies.

# Language

## Individuals with ASD may:

- Have no speech or very limited speech
- Lack of functional language
- Lose previously acquired ability to use language
- Have limited vocabulary
- Have problems with pronoun reversal
- Experience speech disorders
- Experience echolalia or delayed echolalia
- Be very verbal but struggle with pragmatic language.
- May have a delay in processing language.
- Pedantic Speech
- Perseverative Speech

## Accommodations:

- Use Visuals
- Allow Processing Time (10-15 seconds)
- Use Concrete Language
- Offer Flexible Options for Activities.
- Frequent Checks for Understanding
- Write out/Use Visuals for Multi-Step Activities.
- Assign roles if working as a group with expectations/duties.
- Model and Practice activities/expectations

# Social Skills: Language

- Social skills depend on both verbal and nonverbal behavior.
  - Using spoken words/sign language as well as eye contact, body posture, body language.
- When our children can't use language to communicate, they may use inappropriate behavior to interact. (*Example: Hitting peers to play instead of asking to play with them.*)
- Even when a child with autism has language, he may not use it in the right context. (*Example: Calling a teacher by their first name vs. title*)

## **Pragmatic Language:**

- The use of all aspects of communication (eye gaze, facial expressions, body movement and gestures, speech and language) in order to understand and develop complex social relationships
- An individual must utilize all forms of communication in order to fully understand and maintain social relationships
- Using language to interact with those around you
  - Using eye contact to request
  - Initiating play/interactions with others
  - Sustaining play/interactions with others
  - Conversation appropriateness (age, situation, person, environment)
  - Using language appropriate to the context
  - Reading gestures and body language
  - Picking up on social cues

# Motor Skills

- Current research shows that 80% of individuals with Autism have some sort of motor or motor planning difficulty. (SPARK AUTISM)
- Fine Motor skills is most common area impacted (using school tools, personal care, writing)
- Gross Motor and coordination difficulties are less common but still prevalent.



## Accommodations:

- Variety of writing utensils and grips
- Slanted desk/writing space (3 ring binder)
- Scribe/Note buddy
- Provide notes or fill in the blank notes
- Assistive technology: Computer, recorded lessons, speech to text
- Provide Graphic Organizers
- Adjust chair/desk height for proper positioning
- Extra time for moving to new area
- Preferential seating (near board, or to be able to move around area covertly)
- Tape boundaries/mark boundaries
- Provide checklists and/or positive model

# Executive Functioning

- Working Memory (Difficulty retaining and accessing information)
- Cognitive Flexibility (The ability to think about things in multiple ways and problem solve)  
Conversational shift is an example of a difficulty in this area
- Impulse control difficulties
- Organizing thoughts to develop a plan
- Rigid and inflexible thinking
- Maintaining and organizing materials and thoughts
- Processing verbal directions and understanding what is expected

## Accommodations:

- Provide a visual schedule/To do list
- Visuals for multi-step directions
- Break larger activities into chunks
- Timers
- Color coded organization
- Provide copies of directions
- Allow for breaks
- Allow noise cancelling headphones/quiet work space
- Allow for listening to music if sound is needed to focus.

- ## Checks for understanding
- Use attention words and phrase such as, "This is important."  
"Write this down."
  - Use assistive technology like computers, iPads, etc.



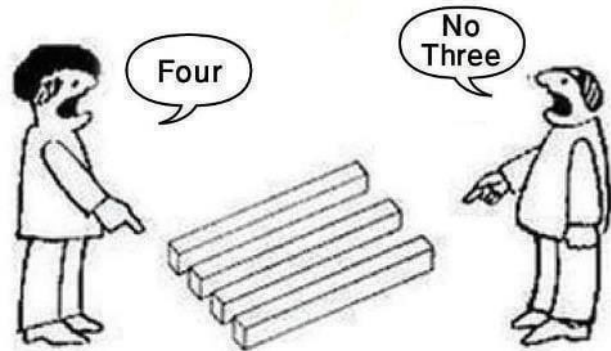
# Perception

- Difficulty perceiving sensory and social input from the environment.
- Difficulty understanding social meaning which can lead to social misunderstanding.
- Difficulty perceiving mental/emotional states of others (perspective)
- Face Blindness

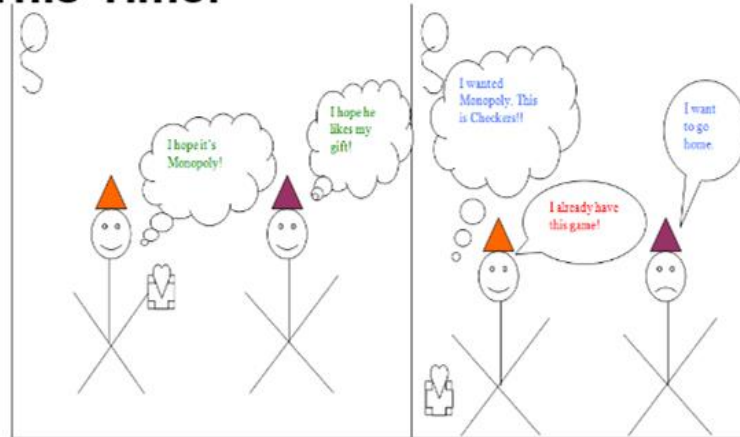
Learning Supports/Accommodations:

- Whole group/small group perspective taking
- Visuals to help with perception (comic strip)
- Sensory supports
- Provide names/name tags when doing group work

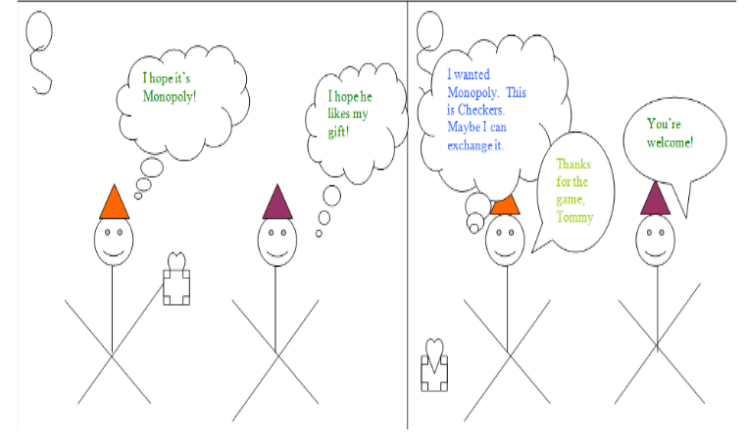
It is really confusing!!!



This Time:



Next Time:



# Creating Inclusive Norms

What is inclusion?

Inclusion refers to the procedures organizations implement to integrate everyone in the community, allowing their differences to coexist in a mutually beneficial way. The goal of inclusion strategies is to make everyone feel accepted and comfortable, ready to share their opinions and thoughts without hesitation.



Everyone Benefits from Creating Inclusive Environments

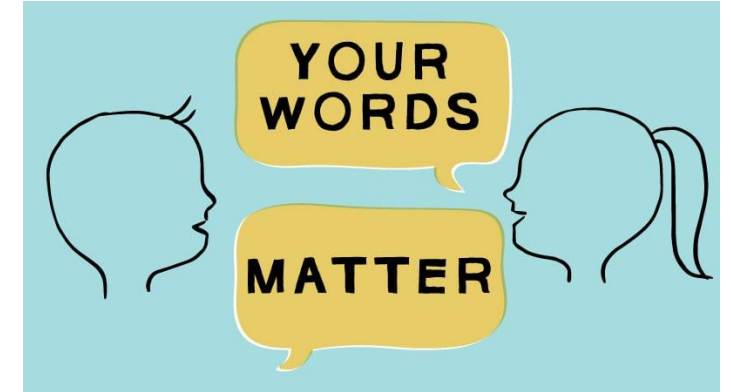


# Positive Language

- Remove all negative phrasing
- Phrase directives in a positive manner



- Tell the individual what they **SHOULD DO** vs. what they **SHOULD NOT DO**
- “Sit in your chair” instead of “Don’t get up”
- “When you finish the puzzle, you can go outside!” instead of “You can’t go outside unless you finish the puzzle.”
- Remove polite phrasing such as phrasing demands as a question or adding please/thank you to requirements.
- Use behavior specific praise
- Graduated Exposure



## Why Predict?

- Knowing what is coming next or what to expect helps ease anxiety and creates structure.
- This can be beneficial to many people, not just individuals with Autism or Anxiety.



## How to Use Prediction for Learning


- 1) Use a visual timer for activities
- 2) Add pictures to a schedule. Ensure you are reviewing the schedule frequently and crossing items off once they have occurred.
- 3) Have a visual with pictures of steps/directions.
- 4) Create visual rules and visual reward systems that are consistently applied to all participants.
- 5) Consider the use of social stories/videos when discussing more abstract social concepts. You can also use social stories about your activity/class/group so expectations can be reviewed with individuals as they transition through activities.

I'm working for

I need:

Rules:    

First 	Then 
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>



## Social Story Example

On Monday August 5th, I will go to camp.



My Mom or Dad will take me to camp or I will ride with a friend.

I will stay at camp all day with my friends.



I will make a lot of new friends at camp.

We will do a lot of fun things.

I will swim.



And ride a horse.



And hike in the woods.



I will eat lunch at camp.



My counselor will help me if I need anything.

My counselor is the person I talk to if I'm having a great time or need a break



If I need a break, I can go someplace quiet for a little while.

When I'm done with my break I can join my friends again.

At 3:00 my Mom or Dad will pick me up to go home or I will ride with a friend.



I will have a schedule everyday to help me know what I am going to do at camp.

At camp I will get to be me and have lots of fun.



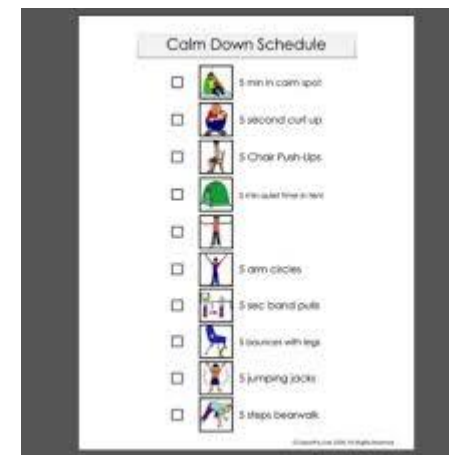
# Methods to Increase Participation

- -Ask specific questions that allow individuals to give input. Avoid vague and yes/no questions such as “Do you like school?” Aim for a more specific question such as “What do you like about math?”
- -Recognize that some individuals may need more processing time to formulate responses and allow for that (up to 15 seconds)
- -Honor attempts to self advocate (i.e. asking for help, asking for a break) for all individuals. Focus on problem solving rather than behavior.
- - Allow individuals to use their interests as a means to motivate participation.



# Creating a Calming Space

- Identify a calm down space in your area that everyone is encouraged to use when they need it.
- Create rules for the calm down space
- Use a timer to set limits (can be on phone or a physical timer)
- Provide books/Social Stories
- Soft lighting/Sunglasses
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Weighted blanket/lap pad
- Variety of fidgets
- Visual Prompts for emotions/calm down strategies








# Use Visuals to Support Rules/Expectations

## Volume Meters



Voice Levels	
3	 Outside Talk
2	 Group Talk
1	 Whisper Talk
0	 No Talk

Talk about size of the problem and use this language frequently

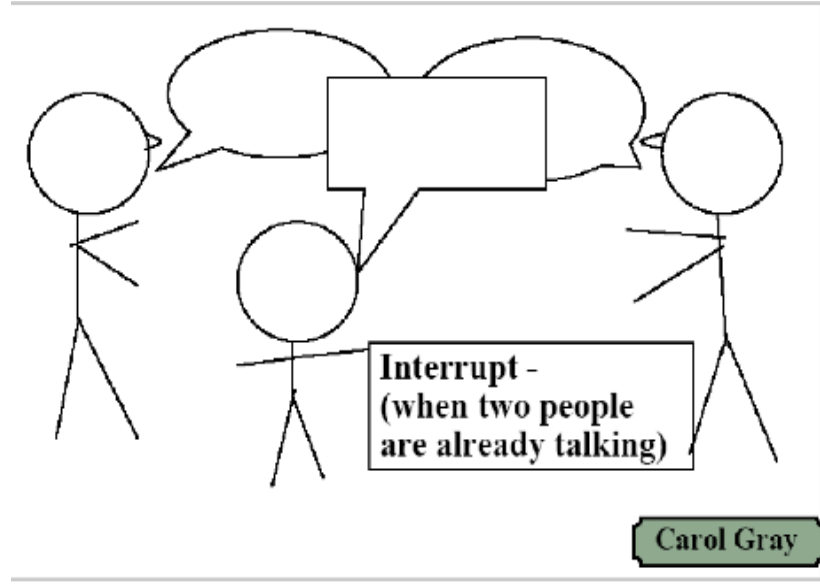
SIZE OF THE PROBLEM		
<b>5</b>	<b>EMERGENCY</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Natural disaster</li> <li>Danger</li> <li>Serious injury</li> </ul>	 <b>FEELING</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Terrified</li> <li>Out of control</li> <li>Fearful</li> </ul>
<b>4</b>	<b>BIG PROBLEM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting into a fight</li> <li>Getting hurt</li> <li>Losing a pet</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scared</li> <li>Mad</li> <li>Upset</li> </ul>
<b>3</b>	<b>MEDIUM PROBLEM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>being disrespected</li> <li>Someone took something of yours</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worried</li> <li>Frustrated</li> <li>Hurt</li> </ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>LITTLE PROBLEM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting a bad grade</li> <li>Can't make a decision</li> <li>Can't find something</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disappointed</li> <li>Embarrassed</li> <li>Annoyed</li> </ul>
<b>1</b>	<b>TINY PROBLEM</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not able to get what you want</li> <li>Losing a game</li> <li>Don't like the food choice</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Okay</li> <li>Fine</li> <li>Calm</li> </ul>

## Visual Rules/Schedules

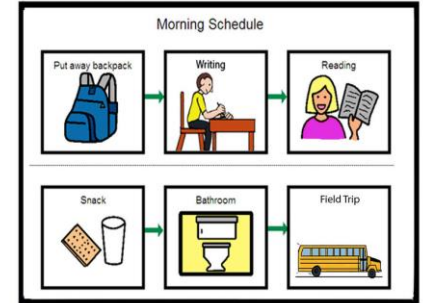


# Premack Schedule

- Buddy Bear Book Choice 😊
- Emotion Cards Choice 😊
- Puzzle Choice 😊
- Guess Who Choice 😊



When I go on a field trip there is a change of schedule.



When I go on a field trip there is a change of schedule.

### Class Rules

- Quiet Voice
- Hands to Yourself
- Listen to Teacher

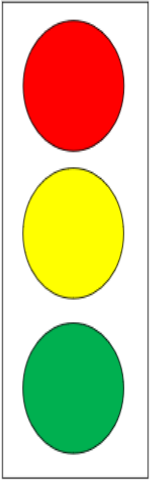
First	Next	Then
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

First	Next	Then
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

First	Then
-------	------

The lights in my room at school are bothering me...



I can start to yell and kick because I am uncomfortable and upset.



Can I get hurt?  
Could I hurt someone else?  
Could I break something?

I can leave the room.

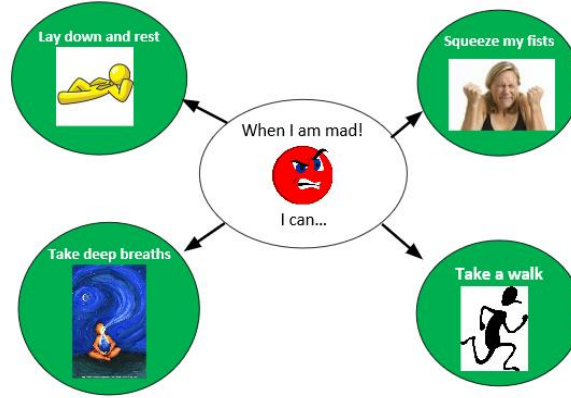


Will this cause me trouble?  
Will this cause others trouble?  
With this solve my situation?

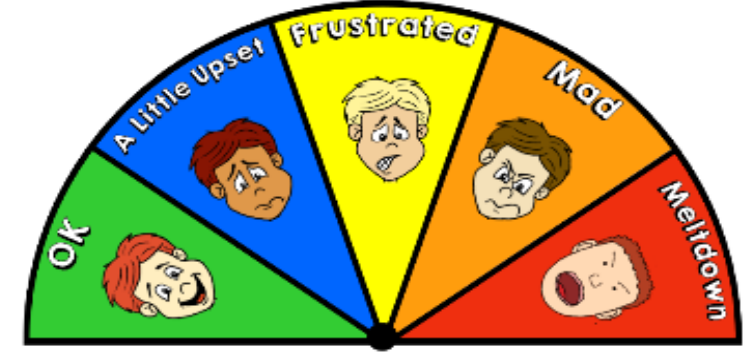
I can tell my teacher that the lights are bothering me and try to find a solution like wearing sunglasses or sitting at a different spot in the room.



Will this solve my situation?  
Will it help me feel better?  
Will it help others feel better?



I'm Feeling...



Jack went with his parents to Home Depot.

He asked his parents if he could buy a fan. They said it wasn't for sale and it was too big.

Jack said he would use his own money but they still said no.

Jack went with his parents to Home Depot.

He asked his parents if he could buy a fan. They said it wasn't for sale and it was too big.

Jack said he would use his own money but they still said no.

Jack started crying and yelling.

His parents gave him options and told him to relax.

Jack continued to cry and yell.

Jack started crying and yelling.

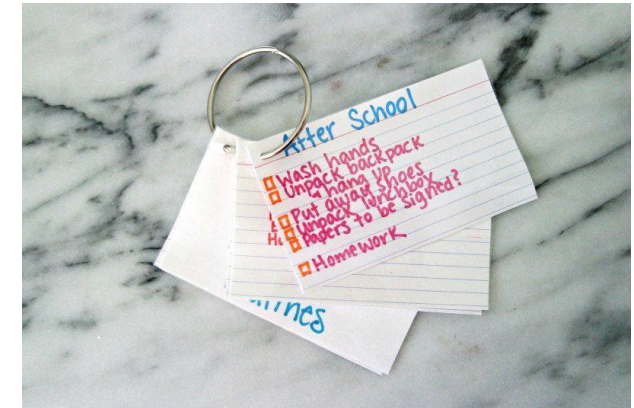
His parents gave him options and told him to relax.

Jack took a short walk and took deep breaths.

Jack didn't get to finish his trip to Home Depot.

They drove straight home and did not stop for ice cream like originally planned.

They finished their shopping trip and then went to the ice cream shop.





# Easterseals Midwest Autism Services

- Family Navigation Meeting
  - Discuss your concerns and needs regarding your child
  - Create a service plan for your family
  - Family navigator will provide you with resources and connect you with services



# Easterseals Midwest Autism Services

- Training
  - Intensive 2 week Parent Training Program
  - Hybrid 2 week Parent Training Program
  - In-Home Parent Training
  - Professional Training
  - Introductory Workshops
  - Support Groups
    - Parent Support Groups
    - Sibshops



- Consultation
  - Observation (school, religious group, etc.)
  - School/IEP Advocacy
  - In-services
  - Family Navigation
- Individual Support
  - Individual Support/Supportive Respite (in-home or drop-off)
  - TGIF/SWAG (social group for middle schoolers and high schoolers)
  - Virtual Bingo, Book Clubs, Building Healthy Habits and more!
  - PEERS Social Skills Classes



- Clinical Therapies
  - Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)
  - Friendship Skills Groups (PEERS/PEERS YA/CFT)



# Employment Services/ Community Living

- Community Connections Adult Day Program
- Pre-Employment
- Summer Teen Employment
- Supported Employment
- Individualized Supported Living
- Independent Living



# LET'S TALK!

- What are some questions or what if scenarios you would like to discuss?



# Contact Information

- If interested in any programs or to find out more, Contact:  
**Admissions**  
**Phone: 314-394-7100**  
**Email: [info@esmw.org](mailto:info@esmw.org)**
- For questions about this presentation or to contact me:  
**Julie Mallett**  
**Autism Specialist**  
**Phone: 314-682-9563**  
**Email: [julie.mallett@esmw.org](mailto:julie.mallett@esmw.org)**